

HABS

M.D.

13-JOP,

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RUMSEY HOUSE (Residence)
Joppa, Maryland

HABS No. Md. 9

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Building Survey
John H. Scarff, District Officer
1012 Keyser Bldg., Baltimore, Maryland

RUMSEY HOUSE (Residence)
Last surviving Building of Old
Joppa, Maryland.

OWNER: The Maryland-Virginia Joint-Stock
Land Bank, Munsey Building,
Baltimore, Maryland.

DATE OF ERECTION: about 1720 and 1768.

ARCHITECT: Unknown.

BUILDER: Unknown.

PRESENT CONDITION: Good.

NUMBER OF STORIES: Two stories and an attic.

MATERIALS OF CONSTRUCTION: Brick, (stone cellar walls under porch),
wood interior construction, wood shingle
roof covered by composition.

OTHER EXISTING RECORDS: "History of Baltimore City and County"
(chapter V) J. Thomas Scharf 1881.

"Early Manor and Plantation Houses of
Maryland" (page 132) Henry Chandlee
Forman 1934.

"Local Institutions of Maryland" Lewis
W. Wilhelm, Ph.D. Johns Hopkins Universi-
ty.

Land Records.

"The Chesapeake Bay Country" Swepson
Earle 1934 (page 247)

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"Taylors Choice" was granted March 4, 1661 to John Taylor, one of the Commissioners of Baltimore County. It appears next in the records in 1707 when the Assembly directed an earlier site for the County Seat of Baltimore County be "deserted, and in lieu thereof fifty acres to be erected into a town on a tract of land on the same river (the Gunpowder) belonging to Anne Felks, and called 'Taylors Choice', and the court house to be built there." Work was at once begun, streets were laid out, and the Court House was in course of construction, when the Queen dissented to the act. In 1712, a new act was passed fixing the County Court at the house built on Taylors Choice "in the Town of Joppa." In 1724 an act recites that:

"The inhabitants of Baltimore County have made to appear to this Assembly that a publick court-house and prison have been erected at Joppa, in the said county, at their expence, and that the right of the land is in a minor, under the age of twenty-one years, who (although his father, Col. James Maxwell, hath received full satisfaction for the said land) cannot convey the same. It then proceeds to enact "that the land already allotted for the building of a court-house and prison shall be and remain to the use of the said county forever, any law, usage, defect, or other thing to the contrary notwithstanding." (In 1719 Taylors Choice had been resurveyed for Col. James Maxwell.) In 1724, twenty acres were purchased and laid out "into forty equal lots, erected into a town, so as the public buildings, aforesaid be included within the twenty acres aforesaid, and that the same lots shall be laid out so as not to affect the buildings and improvements of Col. James Maxwell, or his son, already made at the place aforesaid." Joppa was thus laid out into forty lots of half an acre each, exclusive of the one acre lot set aside for the use of St. John's parish Church, and was divided by Court Street and Church Street running east and west, and Low Street and High Street running nearly north and south. The lots were offered at one pound seven shillings each to be paid to Col. James Maxwell. By the terms of the Act of Assembly, the owner of the land (who had previously received three pounds per acre for his land) was to have the first choice in the selection of lots.

"(No. 23) July the eight, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-

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six, comes Col. James Maxwell (the owner of and person interested in the said land) and makes choice of the lot (No. 23) which he desires may be entered in his name, which is hereby accordingly done at the request aforesaid and risque of the same James Maxwell. On the same day (July 8th) Asaell Maxwell, son of Col. James Maxwell, took up lot No. 24."

Some of the principal^{AL} features of the town emerge, including the church and the court house property, the streets and the two lots belonging to the Maxwells. Joppa was the County Seat of Baltimore County from 1712 to 1768.

"Within its borders were the County Court House, the Chapel, the County's Prison, several Inns and a number of commodious warehouses and stately mansions. In its harbor were vessels from New England, the West Indies and parts of Europe. It became the seat of social and civil life of the county and of the adjoining hundreds and parishes, and being located upon the public highway leading to the northern colonies, it became a well-known resort for travelers and merchants; but owing to the indifference of its citizens, the faulty form of local government, the jealousies of its neighbors, the enterprise of the inhabitants of neighboring towns, the glories of Joppa faded away, and its candlestick was removed to the little settlement (Baltimore) located on the Patapsco River, sixteen miles to the southwest. When Whitfield visited Joppa in 1759 he saw the town in its decline. He calls it a "little town." Within a half century after the visit of the great evangelist, Joppa had passed into the list of "deserted" towns, and has since become so desolate as to make its site an enigma. Baltimore County has many "Joppa roads" traversing it, but it is only lately that the convergent point of these roads has been ascertained. The destruction of the town has been complete. Its warehouses have rotted away, its wharves have disappeared, its harbor has become filled with alluvial deposits, its streets have been turned into plowed fields. Upon its very site have camped the Indians and in the ruins of the silent town they have kindled their camp fires from the rotten timbers of its fallen houses. A few neglected grave stones, several heaps of brick and rubbish and a solitary mansion, belonging to one of the oldest families in the state, are about all that remains of the once famous seaport town of Provincial Maryland. One inscription of remarkable simplicity upon a substantial, well-preserved monument, tells in brief the commercial story of the now deserted town: "Mr. David McCulloh, merchant in Joppa."

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In 1745 Col. Maxwell bought the Church property for 1200 lbs. of tobacco; In 1773 Benjamin Rumsey who had come to Harford County from Cecil County bought from the County Commissioners the Court House property for eighty pounds. Mr. Kirk Brown in the Maryland Historical Magazine, #4-page 384 quotes an agreement made in 1709 with Col. James Maxwell to build a court house at Joppa-- "From the specification it appears that it was to be 35ft. long by 24ft. wide; to have two stories with rooms for the Grand and Petit Jurors and the clerk in the second floor. It was to be completed "with all expenditures" and to cost 125000 lbs. of tobacco."

In 1768 Benjamin Rumsey married the widow of Col. James Maxwell. He would thus come into possession of the Maxwell property. Later on he was to come into possession of the entire tract by purchase. He died in 1808 and left his property to his three grandchildren Charles, Mary, and Emelia with their father, Henry of New York as guardian. Charles who inturn came into the Joppa Farm left it to his three children John, Mary and Margaret. In the division of the property after his death the land passed out of the Rumsey family.

A local legend has it that the existing house at Joppa was the old court house. The writer measured the distance between the house and the tomb of Mr. David McCulloh; and the foundation still visible in the field nearby. These distances were drawn out to the same scale as the map of the old town showing the forty lots; the courthouse, the church property and the old streets. It was assumed that the tomb was in the old church acre, and that the existing long straight lane marked the old High Street, leading to the Court House.

This super-position placed the Farm house not on the court house property but across the line between lots #23 and #24 the ones taken respectively by Col. Maxwell and his son Asaell in July 8, 1726. The dimensions of the Farm House do not agree with the specified dimensions of the court house in the Maxwell agreement of 1709. Now as Benjamin Rumsey married the widow Maxwell in 1768 and as the town was laid out under the act of 1724 the improvements belonging to Col. Maxwell were not to be interfered with, it is thought that Col. Maxwell built the existing house after 1719 when he took up the land and that Rumsey came into possession by marriage. Judge Ritchie says (Maryland Historical Magazine #1 - page 109)

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"My own impression is that, as it originally stood, it was built by Col. James Maxwell about 1720, and constituted part of his improvements which were not to be interfered with in laying out the town under the Act of 1724 and was then enlarged, by a second story when Col. Rumsey occupied it about 1771." Sophia's Dairy a Hall Estate about 10 miles by road from Joppa (HABS No. Md. 8) was built in 1768 the year of Rumsey's Marriage. The details of finish in many cases are identical with corresponding ones in Joppa. It is thought that this is more than a coincidence and that one workman made the details with the same tools. This might confirm Judge Ritchie's opinion that Benjamin Rumsey added a second story to the Maxwell house at Joppa, and it might account for the fact that the second story of the Joppa house is five inches higher than the first. But the writer inclines to the belief that the house was built by Col. Maxwell about 1720 as a two story house and about 1768 when Judge Rumsey married the widow Maxwell he modernized it by new interior finish.

To account for the original design of the house is even more puzzling. A single brick course projects under the second story window sills. From this course to the grade the brick work has been stuccoed, but in the attic over the kitchen this brick work can still be seen. The courses occurring from the brick projecting course to the heads of the first floor windows are rough. Just above the heads of the first floor windows there still remains the cut ends of the joists (three and one half by two and one half, 2' - 2" on center.)

The photograph published on page 147 of Swepson Earles', "The Chesapeake Bay Country" shows the main house before it was stuccoed and the cut joists are easily seen along the north facade.

Under the existing porch floor is a cellar with stone walls and a chimney foundation at the east end. This cellar does not touch the foundations of the main house nor is it under the kitchen. The occupants of the house say that at unusually high tides water comes into the old cellar, and is not usable. The west wall of the present kitchen, removed by three feet from the east wall of the house, is of frame.

Received July 13, 1936 T.H.C.

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It is thought by this writer that at one time the kitchen was smaller and over the old cellar; that it was a separate building three feet away from the main house and that the main house had a sloping pent roof of German-town hood between the windows of the first and second story around the four sides. This is a motif met with in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware among German and Dutch settlers. Now Harford County is next to Cecil County and Cecil County is the only County in Maryland Tidewater where there were any number of German settlers.

Today the farm is reached, from the main thoroughfares north and south which are farther west above the tidal streams, through ^{one mile of} scrub woods. In the early 18th century the main route through Maryland, north and south, crossed the Gunpowder river by ferry from Taylors' Mount through Joppa. Today the city lots are level fields full of truck produce for the city markets. The place seems very remote except for the almost incessant drone of passing airplanes and the rumble of trains over the two long Gunpowder bridges.

John H. Craft